

Colour of residential architecture of classicism and neoclassicism in Russia

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# **Colour of residential architecture of classicism and neoclassicism in Russia**

<sup>1</sup>Mariya Komarova

<sup>1</sup> Dep. Architecture and Design, Politecnico di Torino, mariya.komarova@polito.it

## **1. Colour evolution in Russian residential architecture**

The Russian residential architecture has remained wooden for a long time. The colour of an ordinary building of pre-Petrine Russian cities determined by the fact that the street was imaged purely functional and served only as a passage. Manor, "interior" way of developing prevailed in the cities. Houses were situated within the plot of land, and fences were facing the street, so log towers and white-stone palace "disappeared" for the city [1].

Large centers of Kremlin and the Moscow monasteries polychromy and of other Russian cities of that time were not supported by the colour accompaniment of residential buildings, didn't develop in polychromy of streets and squares. The exceptions were the central part of the defensive fortifications, churches and a small number of stone palaces. The colour image of Russian residential architecture, which is dominated by wood, was associated not only with the colour restraint, but with expressive colour range of soft ocher-brown and gray-silver shades. Against this background, striped delicate wooden carvings and colourful patterns with natural ornaments made by folk artists, gave an appearance of festivity and hospitality to simple dwelling houses.

Colour, both in public as well as in residential architecture, determined by the characteristics of architectural styles after the urban planning reforms of Peter I. A combination of cobalt, blue or pistachio (general background) colours with white details, with a gilded and dark bronze decor are typical for Russian Baroque of the middle of the XVIII century. These colours are inherent in the palace architecture of St. Petersburg and its suburbs.

With decrees by the Senate of Catherine II from 1773 brick and stone became the basic building materials due to frequent fires of wooden buildings in the Russian cities. Residential homestead with a complex of household buildings on the mansion (stable, coach-house, woodshed and hayloft) became the major urban development unit from the period of 1780s. [3]. However, people continued to build wooden houses, but with a new decorative material - plaster, which served as a kind of camouflage and not "betrayed" the basic building material. During the reign of Catherine II in the Russian architecture due to the Italian masters the style of classicism arose, in which the cities around all the country built up for decades. Classicism developed its attitude towards colour and its range of colours, particularly active in early XIX century. Residential architecture acquired a new colour scheme. (Fig.1)

## **2. The artistic unity of Russian classicism**

The Russian architectural palette of colours became regulated by special decrees in the era of Alexander I. The emperor has begun regulation of urban colourity from Moscow after the visit to the city in 1816. The decree was issued that the houses and

fences must be painted more delicate and with the best of light colours: *dikiy* (greyish, gray, and ash grey), *blanzheviy* (flesh-colour) (Fig.2) and pale yellow with green tint. Stone structures according to the decree could be whitewashed [6].

Special Commission for the country's development and building that was created by the emperor's decree gave the plans and facades for the construction of new and for the repair of burned houses. It also obliged the owners to paint houses on plaster with light colours only: light yellow, light green, light gray or white.

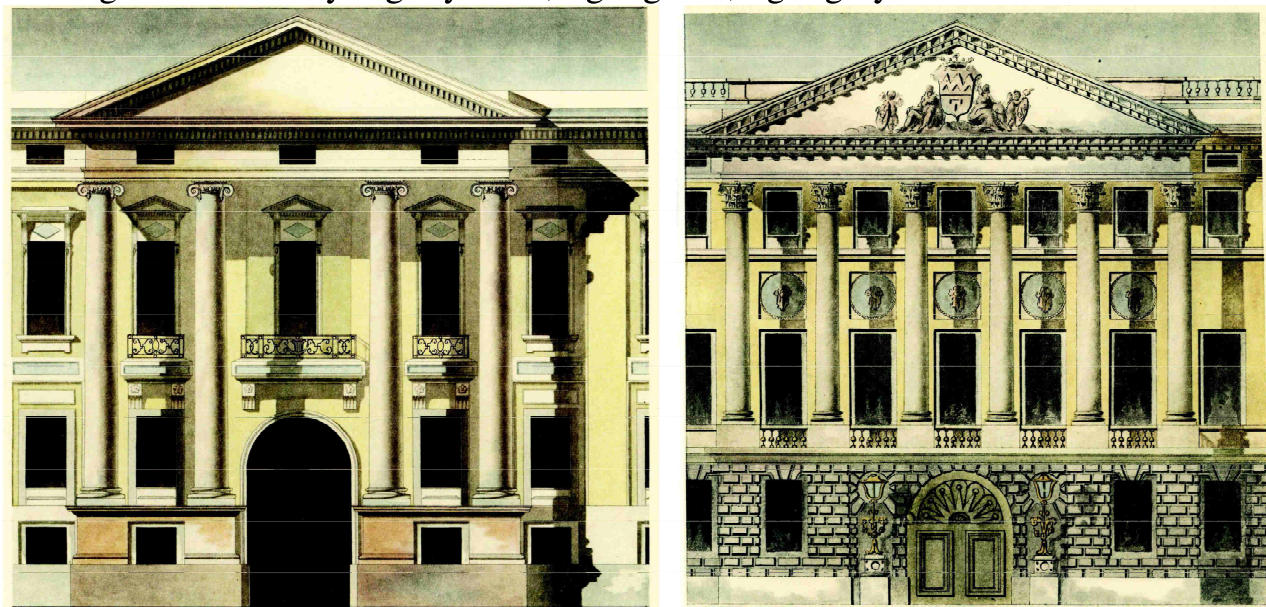


Fig. 1 - Prozorovsky House on Tverskaya Street is on the left (demolished in 1930). Demidov House on Gorokhovskiy Lane is on the right (from 1925 it is Ushinsky Scientific Pedagogical Library). Architect Matvey Kazakov, the end of the 18th century.

The following decree of December 13, 1817 strictly regulated the architecture colour of St. Petersburg. It was allowed to paint houses according to the following colours only: white, pale yellow, maize yellow, light gray, *dikiy* (silver gray), pale pink and Siberian (copper-green), but with a large admixture of white paint [7]. A special commission was engaged in the selection and control of the colours. Paint samples were sent for construction on special wooden plates, which can be considered a kind of prototype of modern colour chart. The police supervised the rules of painting.

With these decrees, all the houses in the central streets of Russian cities united in a single colour system. Tight colour regulation of a large number of the buildings played a great urban planning role: it helped to create colouristic unity of streets and squares, to form a complete colour environment of the city.

Soft pastel colours (with lots of white) - pale yellow, pale blue, pale pink, greenish, being legalized by decrees of the emperor were the predominant palette. Analyzing image colouristic Smolensk XVIII century, Z. Pastukhova notes that there was a dominant colour in the urban architecture, "colour scheme in the city of Smolensk was often subordinated to the main colour scheme: to Smolensk, Roslavl, Gzhatsk, Dorogobuzh, Porec - muted yellow and pale yellow. Motley inflorescence reigned only in Vyazma: white, yellow, and red" [4].

Two-colour art becomes the norm in the architecture of late classicism. This principle is organically linked with the compositional system. Two contrasting colours correspond to the combination of massive architectural elements and details with a large background planes of the walls. White columned portico, white relief

moldings - masks, garlands, friezes - clearly stand out on the surface of the warm, ocher-yellow walls, and these two primary colours enrich each other.



Fig. 2 - Khomyakov House. The facade along Kopyevsky Lane, architect Giuseppe Bova, 1823.

The project of restoration, reconstruction and technical equipment of the Bolshoi Theater complex of buildings, elaborated by ZAO «Kurortproject» and OOO «Restavrator-M», 2009-2011.

Two-tone facade is connected not only with the peculiarities of the composition, but also with the material - plastered brick and wood. Plaster serves as a carrier of independent plastic and colour characteristics of the architectural work. Through the development of architecture, finishing techniques and artistic crafts plastered wood itself became a new material with new properties. Painted plaster is an essential element among the architectural features and expressive means of Russian classicism. Aristocratic mansions and manor houses, having in the constructive manner wooden house, were designed in a new way. White columns, organizing a portico were created from simply logs, posed upright and sheathed with plywood, sometimes stretched over a canvas on which was deposited a layer of plaster. Basement rustication was composed of plaster planks; and "stone" surface of the walls got the opportunity thanks to the same plaster to be painted in intense colour. Classicism was the leading style in the architecture of the Russian Empire, at that time the construction of new towns has become an unprecedented scale. This served as a model for urban development also in the Soviet Union.

### **3. The main characteristics of the Soviet neoclassicism: classical details and colour.**

At the beginning of the 1930s. the impact of state sharply increased on all spheres of life of Soviet society. Neoclassicism in architecture became the predominant style of the Stalin era, lasted until the end of the 1950s. After the Second World War, Soviet cities were re-built, which included Minsk, Kalinin, Volgograd (former Stalingrad).



At the time the promotion of traditional values and the ideology of good citizenship received widespread, and that was the main criterion for strengthening the position of Stalin's neoclassicism.



Fig. 3 – Residential buildings of Soviet neoclassicism , 1940s.

This style also appealed not to the forms, but to the compositional principles of Russian architecture and its classical heritage. Soviet architects took a great interest in in-depth study of historical patterns, detailed imitation of decorative details, and reproduction of lush classical orders decoration. Antique order combined with stucco heraldic compositions was almost always used in the design of houses. In some cases attributes of the Imperial Empire, inspired by the French model (wreaths, shields, and spears) were also met [2].

As for the colour composition of facades, it also borrowed the colour palette of Russian classicism. Golden-white bicolour usually dominated in the range of pastel

colours. Since Russian classicism, it has become an integral feature of Russian cities, because it successfully made up for missing the warm shades of the northern nature, created a golden glow of the atmosphere, even on cloudy days (Fig.3). Stalin's neoclassicism primarily pursued urbanistic targets, so in the spirit of the new style were built shops, railway stations, schools, factories and dwelling houses. Rebuilds entire streets and squares. Architects sought to create symmetric static buildings, completely abandoning any stylistic confusion.

#### 4. Colour transformation and reproduction of the historical colour atmosphere.



Fig. 4 - Chernyshev House, project by M.Kazakov. Now it is the building of the Moscow mayor's office.

With the help of colour it is possible to emphasize individual buildings among other structures of the architectural complex. A striking example of this is the building of the Moscow mayor's office, which is located on Tverskaya Street, 13. In 1782 the residential house was built by count Z. Chernyshev in the style of Russian classicism on the project of architect Matvey Kazakov. (Fig. 4) In 1790 the Treasury bought the building. The original facades were made in yellow and white. Since 1917 the building was under the jurisdiction of Moscow Soviet, it acquired intense colour (rich dark red), which became to emphasize it among the other buildings formed the



street and the area adjacent to the building. Even now the building of Moscow mayor's office plays a dominant role in the streets and squares composition. (Fig.4)

In the late 1940s, after the Second World War in the Soviet Union not only central but also peripheral, working-class districts of cities began to be built the new low-rise residential buildings which were popularly dubbed "the German". In reality, these homes were designed by Soviet architects in the style of Stalinist neoclassicism. These residential areas are particularly noteworthy, as examples of the colour reproduction of the atmosphere of the historic city center in a large residential area on the periphery. Colour themes of the past, typical of the period of dawn and rise of Russia after the victory in the War of 1812 were used in new areas of Soviet cities. This caused the residents a sense of belonging to the country's history, a sense of patriotism, was assessed positively, which further led the Soviet Union to the industrial and economic development.

## 5. Conclusions

The use of colour is a complex and multifaceted problem in architecture. The creation a colour environment, having a sign of wholeness and completeness, requires an integrated approach to the definition of objectives the colour use in architecture. A clear relationship of architects, builders and the state, allows us to solve a number of ethical, psychological, and economic problems. Examples of Russian classical and Soviet neoclassicism argue that strict regulation can promote active colour transformation of ancient cities and favorably affectes on the creation of unified colour environment of the new-built areas.

Architect using colour reveals the logic of three-dimensional structure, which is inseparable from the creation of psychophysiological human comfort . Colour is an important part of the architectural form. In appropriate combination the colours is a means of expressing the architectural structure content, its aesthetic merits.

Theoretical studies in the field of colour and the development of functional and aesthetic demands of architecture open up new horizons in the use of colour in architecture [5].

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